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AN ESSAY ON PLAYS AND *MASQUERADES.*

By the AUTHOR *of the* OCCASIONAL PAPER.

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AN ESSAY ON PLAYS AND *MASQUERADES.*

PLAYS and Publick Actings have been very antient, and may be innocent and uſeful under the Conduct of Wiſdom and Virtue; and where there is a ſtrict Regard to Truth and Decency, without any Thing ſhocking or offenſive to Modeſty and Religion. There is no Neceſſity of Liberty and Looſeneſs, of falſe Embelliſhments of Oaths and Imprecations, or any Thing immoral or profane. *That* ariſes from the vicious Diſpoſition of the *Poet*, or the falſe Taſte of the Audience, not from the Nature and Reaſon of the Thing.

THEY are capable of being made a proper Entertainment to virtuous Minds: They may be ſuited to convey right Notions, and to raiſe and improve our Ideas of Virtue, and

Loyalty, and Friendſhip. There are ſome Inſtances of ſuch Performances in the Service of Religion, where the lively Images, and beautiful Deſcriptions, mightily engage and delight the Mind: As the incomparable Mr. *Boyle's Theodora & Dydimus*, a *Sacred Romance*; *Grotius's* Tragedy of the *Paſſion*, and *Buchanan's Jephtha*; and *Milton's Sampſon Agoniſtes*. They may eaſily be ſo order'd as to convey *Moral* Inſtructions, and uſeful Rules of Life; by tracing the Steps of others Advancement and Honours, and of their Capacities and Service to the World; and by recommending brave and worthy Actions, and making them appear ſhining and lovely in the Light of a *ſucceſsful Example*; or, by skilfully marking the Errors of their Conduct, and the Reaſons and Occaſions of their Fall and Misfortune. They are proper to repreſent the Vices and Follies of Men to a Diſadvantage, and put them out of Countenance; to rally the Follies of the Great, and make faſhionable Cuſtoms appear ridiculous, which are grown too obſtinate, or are out of the Reach of other Methods of Cure; and to promote the Love of our Country, and a Zeal for the Publick Welfare: To inſpire Men with Sentiments of Liberty, and generous Regards, and raiſe a juſt Indignation of Arbitrary Government and Slaviſh Submiſſion. Mr. *Dennis's Revolution*, and Mr. *Addiſon's Cato*, were ſeaſonable Performances, and often acted to good Purpoſe. Or to recommend private Friendſhip; to raiſe Tenderneſs and Compaſſion to the Miſeries and Misfortunes of other Men, and improve the Offices of mutual Love, and com-

mon

mon Humanity. Mr. *Dennis*'s *Iphigenia* is a noble Inſtance here; and they have a ſpecial Advantage to move the Paſſions, and fix the Ideas of Things in our Minds. When the Thoughts are juſt, the Expreſſion beautiful, the Frame and Contrivance skilful, the Action natural and regular, it has a ſtrange Force; we often ſee how deep *Tragedy* affects the Mind, upon a low Subject, and to an ill Purpoſe. And who can doubt but it might be turn'd the right Way, and made ſerviceable to a more worthy and noble End?

THIS I ſay, in Juſtice to the Subject I am upon, and as what might well be conceiv'd of in the *Theory*, but what is hardly to be expected in *Practice*, from the *Engliſh Stage*. Neither our Poets, nor Actors, nor the Audiences that encourage them at preſent, ſhewing any Diſpoſition to ſuch virtuous Performances. And hence it comes to paſs, that ſuch a Play as *Cato* being produc'd but very rarely, it only ſerves to do Miſchief; by drawing in the better and ſoberer Part of the Town, to thoſe Diverſions, which, in the common Courſe of them, are the moſt pernicious Things in the World. And for my own Part, I can't help wiſhing, that either all Dramatick Entertainments were like *Cato*, and thoſe of that ſort; or elſe that there were none ſuch: For then I hope in a little Time there would be none at all: Every Thing of this Kind, when ill apply'd, makes thoſe Publick Repreſentations greater Inſtruments of Miſchief.

THE Modern Stage is calculated and deſign'd to fill the Mind with falſe Notions of Honour, and wrong Sentiments of Things; to corrupt

corrupt the Imagination, to fire the Paſſions of unexperienc'd Youth, to wear out Impreſſions of Virtue, and to diſpoſe, by degrees, to every Evil.

THE Miſchief done to our Youth in general, by this kind of Diverſion, is a Matter of eaſy and common Obſervation. No Age of Life is equally liable with this to the Inſinuations of Pleaſure, or ſo apt to be led off by it from all that is ſerious, and that requires Intenſeneſs of Thought: And when Pleaſure is dreſs'd out to Advantage, and recommended by dazzling Images, beautiful Deſcriptions, charming Oratory, and graceful Action, how much more forcibly will it inſinuate into the Heart, poſſeſs and captivate every Power of the Mind? And when, in this Age of Life, Men, from a natural Vivacity of Imagination, hate the Fatigue and Engagement of Buſineſs, how eaſily may they, by theſe Means, be utterly ſeduc'd from it? And among a trading People, this is a Miſchief to be dreaded and ſhunn'd to the laſt Degree: Trade requiring Induſtry and Application, that the Mind be bent to it, and engag'd in it.

THE Men of Leiſure are not indeed ſo much concern'd in this Reflection; but yet they may be ruin'd by taking ſuch a wrong Turn of Mind in Youth. For a Mind unattentive to every Thing but Pleaſure, is a Mind enervated, diſſolv'd, put entirely out of its own Poſſeſſion and Power; and a Man of ſuch a Temper is in a Manner loſt to the reſt of the Species; he is at the Beck of every wanton Imagination, at the Call of every tempting Object,

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and eaſily prevail'd upon to melt himſelf down to the Droſs of the baſeſt Senſuality.

And the Repreſentations of our Stage, at preſent, are fitted to the laſt Degree to feed this Inclination, to give a Reliſh to all the frothy and fulſome Pleaſures of the vain and vicious Part of Mankind. Vice is carry'd in Repreſentation vaſtly beyond Nature, and ſet off with all the poſſible Advantages, both of Words and Geſtures, and all the Enchantments of Muſick. And when the Man has a natural Turn of Mind towards ſenſual Satisfactions, and has flung off all Regard for Buſineſs, what a Length may he be carry'd by theſe Theatrical Diverſions? He is ſwimming with the Stream, and theſe Repreſentations add, beyond what can be imagin'd, to the Violence of the Current. For where the bold Blaſphemer is the Hero, the diſſolute Rake is the fine Gentleman, the Strumpet the Woman of Character and good Breeding; where the Man of Virtue and Probity (even every one who has not quite worn off all the Impreſſions of a good Education, and has ſome Religion and Conſcience left, who can't ſwear cleverly, damn roundly, and ſin impudently) is repreſented as the moſt deſpicable and worthleſs Wretch; here the very Bounds are broken down between Virtue and Vice. That which ſhould engage Veneration, is expos'd to Scorn and Contempt: And that which ſhould create Horror, is, by falſe Dreſs and Appearance, ſet off with Charms; made to inſinuate into the Heart, and that, in a manner irreſiſtibly, conſidering the Prepoſſeſſion of the Mind in favour of Vanity and Vice. What Multi-

tudes

tudes have, in this Way, been carry'd off from all Senſe of Virtue, and drawn into the moſt diſſolute Courſe of Life? And how many noble Families have, by this Means, run all out to Dregs?

BUT were our ſcenical Performances leſs vicious, they are naturally fitted to do Miſchief to the *plain Part* of Mankind, who are the moſt proper for carrying Trade and Buſineſs to any Height. For which Reaſon, if for no other, they muſt be a Nuiſance to any Place depending upon Traffick. The Plan of moſt of theſe Repreſentations is *Romantick*, and the Conduct of them full of Intrigue.

THE firſt of theſe is naturally fitted to put the Imagination on the flutter, and give the Mind a Diſtaſte of every Thing common, and not very apt to ſurprize. And how odd a Turn is this for a Man who muſt keep plodding on, with a Mind intent upon his Buſineſs, and be contented to drive as it will go? Indeed the Projector in Trade is the *Hero* in a Romance. He muſt think out of the Way, and grow rich by a *Coup d'Ecclat*. And thus many times, he gets broken Bones by encountring Windmills; or breaks his Neck by building Caſtles in the Air. This is the perfect Romantick Turn of Thought; a Taſte of nothing but what is odd and aſtoniſhing. And how naturally does the long-expected Winding-up of the Play, and the ſurprizing Iſſue of it at laſt, give the Mind ſuch a Ply as this? It is viſible that ſuch as frequent the Theatre, eſpecially in the gay Scene of Life, take this unhappy Turn. They put on the romantick Air, and talk in the romantick Tone; their

their common Converſation is throughly tinctur'd with this Jargon; they become bold, enterprizing, and yet effeminate.

FOR it muſt be remember'd, that all the Courage of a romantick Hero is inſpir'd by a Miſtreſs; it is the meer Effect of Love, and this, for the moſt Part, of the baſer Kind. He can combat Giants, ſtorm Caſtles, attack Armies, encounter Lions and Tygers, hew Dragons to Pieces: He can climb Rocks, and fling himſelf down a Precipice, to recommend himſelf to a beautiful Damſel, and thus open a Way into her Heart; for the Divine Thing has full Poſſeſſion of his; and the dear Image, brooding on his Mind, creates that generous Ardour that ſparkles in his Eyes, flouriſhes in his Arms, puſhes him on to the moſt hazardous Attempts, and yet carries him ſafe through all his glorious Dangers. If he had not a Miſtreſs, if his Heart were not full of Devotion to the Female, he would be as unenterprizing a Man as the reſt of his Kind. But what an Elevation of Soul does this Affection give him? What Bravery does it infuſe? It makes him bold beyond all Bounds. The more hazardous the Enterprize, the more reaſonable is it, in his Account, to undertake it: He ſhall the more recommend himſelf to her on whom he dotes; and this is the very Heighth of his Ambition, the very laſt Thing he has in view.

WHAT a Mixture is here! a Mind ſoften'd to the laſt Degree, by a criminal Paſſion, ſo that the Hero, many times, whines, and faints, and gaſps for Life, through the Vehemence of his Love; and yet a ſudden Gleam of Hope, a pleaſing Viſion of his Idol, ſhall recall ex-

piring Life, collect all the ſcatter'd Spirits, put Warmth into the whole Man, and give him a Vigour more than mortal. His Heart ſhall not ſhake at the moſt frightful Dangers, nor his Strength fail in the moſt fierce and bloody Encounter. He ſhall fight any Thing, and never flinch from the Battle, nor yet be worſted in it. This is the Inſpiration of Plays; and all this Courage and Bravery is the Effect of Devotion to a beautiful Lady. And the Language and Air that is at once effeminate and enterprizing, ſoft even to languiſhing, and yet ſo bold as to be full of Defiance, is the true romantick Strain. Such a Turn as this do the Repreſentations of the Stage inſenſibly give the Mind and Manners of thoſe, our Youth eſpecially, that attend them: A Turn that is indeed viſionary and enthuſiaſtick, and of all Things moſt unfit for Trade and Traffick.

BUT the Conduct of theſe Repreſentations is very intriguing; the Plot of the Play is the Maſter-wheel in this elegant Machine. The great Art of the Poet lies in carrying on one Deſign thorough many a perplexing Circumſtance, to a certain and commonly a ſurprizing End, tho' not always over honourable, or very innocent. Now this generally ſtrikes the youthful Mind, full of Vigour and Quickneſs, and fond of Novelty and Surprize. At firſt, perhaps, 'tis only ſtruck with the aſtoniſhing Events; but by degrees he falls into the Conduct of the Play, and obſerves by what Steps it proceeds to this Concluſion, and how through many Intricacies and Turnings the Thing in view is accompliſh'd and brought about

about at laſt. And this, by inſenſible Degrees leads him into the Contrivance, gives him a deal of Satisfaction in the Succeſs of the Intrigue; though the glorious Upſhot be, many times, no more than cheating a Parent to ſteal a Fortune, deceiving a Friend to debauch his Wife, making a Man kill himſelf to be reveng'd on a proſperous Rival, or a Woman embrue her Hands in her own Blood, becauſe ſhe had ſtain'd her Honour, and could not continue to be lewd, and yet keep up her Reputation. And this ſort of intriguing opens all thoſe ſecret Scenes of Wickedneſs, that ſhould, if poſſible, be ever kept conceal'd, and remain as dark and unknown, as they are black and deteſtable.

BUT the very intriguing Humour it ſelf corrupts, and gives a Turn no way proper and ſuitable to Trade. It carries the Man of Trade off from his proper Buſineſs; for he has other Schemes to lay, and other Intrigues to carry on. But, if he ſhould think fit to tranſlate the Theatre into his Shop, or the Exchange, and purſue his Deſigns according to the Schemes he has ſeen laid and proſecuted in Plays, he will be in great danger of loſing himſelf. Should the Man of Buſineſs always affect to act in the Dark, carry on his Deſigns under Ground, and perplex all he has to deal with, that at laſt he may ſhine in upon them at once, and ſurprize all about him, by opening his Deſign, he would ſoon ruin all his Credit and Intereſt. Such a dark clandeſtine Method may indeed ſerve to conceal and diſguiſe a Knave; but however Knavery may ſucceed in ſome few Inſtances with par-

ticular Perſons, it muſt, in general Practice, ruin all Traffick. It is frank, and open, and honeſt Dealing, that muſt raiſe Credit, and engage Cuſtomers. The intriguing Turn muſt be exceedingly pernicious to the trading Part of Mankind. And Methods of Diverſion that at once teach the Art, and inſinuate the Love of intriguing, ought therefore to be eſteem'd particularly unſuitable and dangerous to a trading People.

BUT tho' the Danger and Detriment to this particular Set of Men, from Entertainments of this kind, be very obvious and remarkable, yet theſe are far from being the *only* Perſons that are like to ſuffer by them. This Miſchief muſt be more extenſive; 'tis general, as well as great, if we conſider the direct Tendency the Stage has to deſtroy all manner of *Truth:* And by this means Plays become the Root and Spring of all manner of Diſorders. They are apt to give others, as well as the Perſons above-mention'd, falſe Notions of Things, and to lead all that frequent them into falſe Schemes of Life, and incline Perſons to act upon a view of Things in their own Fancies, which carries them quite a-croſs to the Courſe of Things in the World. And then Men quarrel with every Diſappointment, and will rather diſturb the Order of Nature, and vilify the Proceedings of Providence, and confound all about them, than give up their wild Projects and Expectations. Their Heads are ever working about one uſeleſs, if not baſe, Intrigue or other, inſtead of applying themſelves to the Buſineſs of Life. They are building *Caſtles*

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in the *Air*, when they ſhould be laying the true Foundation for Glory and Happineſs, I mean, attending to Actions that are wiſe, and beneficial, and worthy of Praiſe.

'Tis the Ruin of *Servants* to have their Heads fill'd with a Company of airy and towering Expectations; makes them think themſelves preſently above their Stations, or leads them to play innumerable falſe and unfaithful Tricks in their Service: And it gives them ſuch a roving Temper, that they will never continue long in any Station, nor make it their Study to ſuit themſelves to it.

'Tis the great Cauſe of Diſobedience and Undutifulneſs in *Children* to frequent Plays, and to be converſant with *Romances*: They thereby grow into a Contempt of all the Orders of a Family, and the Commands of Parents, and impatient under all manner of Reſtraint, tho' never ſo prudent or neceſſary. They are ever contriving either to impoſe upon the good Nature, or to caſt Contempt and Slights upon the Anger and Reſentment, of thoſe to whom they ſhould be ſubject. And 'tis ten to one, but by ſome of thoſe Managements which they have learn'd from the Stage, they ſhall bring about Matches, or Revolutions in Families, which ſhall ruin the Glory, Credit, and Comfort of them.

And then after Marriage, 'tis this that leads many a young *Couple* into thoſe wild and expenſive Managements, that render themſelves the Scorn, and their Eſtates the Prey of thoſe about them.

'Tis the falſe Repreſentations of Things in Plays that tempt married Perſons to become

come unfaithful to one another, and to court the Affections, and give themſelves up to the Embraces of Strangers. Here we muſt charge, in a great meaſure, the Loſs of that Family-Conduct and Government, which gave ſuch a Greatneſs to ſome of our Anceſtors. The Inſtitution of *Marriage* itſelf is the common Jeſt of the Play-Houſe; and every thing that is wiſe and regular in that State is expos'd to Contempt.

THE Stage teaches Men to throw the utmoſt Contempt upon *Magiſtrates*, particularly the *City Magiſtrates*. The Names of GOD and CHRIST are moſt trivially us'd, and ſometimes moſt ſhockingly blaſphem'd. The *Prieſthood* is ſcandalouſly abuſed, and all manner of Superiors are inſulted. The worſt Vices are encourag'd, and the brighteſt Virtues are ſullied and diſgrac'd. The *Church*, I ſay, the *Church*, is moſt ſcurrilouſly treated; and infamous Endeavours are made to create in the Minds of Men an utter Abhorrence of the Society for Reformation of Manners, to whom this City and Nation ſtand ſo much indebted. The Scriptures are burleſqu'd, and all Religion is undermin'd; in ſhort, all the Order of Things is inverted: And if the Stage prevails, as it has been manag'd here in *England*, even by the Direction of the moſt celebrated Poets, it muſt throw all into Diſorder and Confuſion *.

AND

* See Inſtances of theſe Things in the *Evil and Danger of Plays*, by Mr. *Bedford*, Chaplain to his Grace *Wriothesly* Duke of *Bedford*.

AND we have numberleſs Inſtances of all theſe Enormities, even ſince Mr. *Collier* complain'd ſo juſtly and loudly of the *Incorrigibleneſs of the Stage*; ſo that there is great reaſon to repeat what he has ſaid upon that Head in his *Short Diſſuaſive from the Play-Houſe* in 1703. "The *Poets*, indeed, (as that Author "obſerves) finding their Cauſe expos'd by "thoſe that writ againſt them, as too groſs "and defenceleſs, and that the Force of "Truth would prevail, they laid down, and "left the Field. The *Players* alſo met with "farther Inſtruction; the *Laws* were let looſe "upon them; they were diſciplin'd at *Weſtminſter-Hall*: However, all this Conviction and Diſcouragement won't do. They "are Proof againſt Reaſon and Puniſhment, "againſt Fines and Arguments, and come "over again with their old Smut and Profaneneſs. One would think, by their deſperate Puſhing, they were reſolv'd to exterminate Religion, and ſubdue the Conſcience of the Kingdom."

WHAT that Author adds in the next *Page*, we have *freſh* Occaſion to obſerve and inſert, *Muſicians* and *Players*, of late, having ſo many of them found their way hither from foreign Parts: "As if the old Batteries were too "weak, they have ſtrengthen'd the Attack, "and levy'd Recruits of Muſick and Dancing beyond Sea. There was great Occaſion, no queſtion, to draw down more "Forces upon Fleſh and Blood, and to "ſpring a new Mine, to help ſtorm the "Senſes, and blow up the Paſſions to Combuſtion. And when People are thus

"thrown

" thrown off their Guard, and diſarm'd of " their Diſcretion, the *Play-Houſe* is admi- " rably furniſhed with *Proviſion* to ſeize the " Advantage, and improve the Opportu- " nity."

After this Mr. *Collier* obſerves, " That " the Republick of *Rome*, before *Julius Cæſar*, " ſtop'd the building of a *Theatre*, being " fully convinc'd that this Diverſion would " bring in foreign Vice; that the old *Roman* " Virtue would be loſt, and the Spirits of " the People emaſculated. This wiſe Na- " tion made the Function of Players ſcan- " dalous, ſeiz'd their Freedoms, and threw " them out of Privilege and Reputa- " tion *." And then coming to our own Conſtitution, he ſhews, † " That the Players " are forbidden to act and ſcatter their In- " fection thro' the Kingdom, under very " ſevere and infamous Penalties. In the " Reign of the famous Queen *Elizabeth* " there was an Order of Queen and Coun- " cil, to drive the *Players* out of the City " and Liberties of *London*, ‡ and to pull " down the *Theatres*; which was executed ac- " cordingly." To this I may ſubjoin, that all *Licences* to Actors, or common Players, are taken away by a *Statute* ** in King *James* I's Reign. And ſince Mr. *Collier* writ againſt the Stage, we have a Statute made in the *twelfth* Year of the Reign of her late Majeſty

* Defence of the View of the Stage, *&c.* *p.* 85,
† Diſſwaſ. *p.* 12. *and* View of the Stage, *chap.* 6.
‡ 39 *Eliz*, *cap.* 4. ** *Jac.* 1. *cap.* 7.

Majeſty Queen *Anne*, intitled, *An Act for reducing the Laws relating to Rogues, Vagabonds, ſturdy Beggars, and Vagrants, into one Act of Parliament*; wherein it is enacted, among other Things, "That all Fencers, Bear-wards, "common Players of Interludes, *&c.* ſhall "be taken and judg'd Rogues and Vaga-"bonds; and the Conſtables, or other Inha-"bitants, may bring ſuch before a Juſtice of "Peace to be examin'd.

"And every Perſon declar'd to be a "Rogue, *&c.* by this Statute, ſhall, by the "Juſtice of Peace, be ſent to the laſt Place of "Settlement, Place of Birth, *&c.* and may "be publickly whipp'd, and ſent to the Houſe "of Correction.

"Conſtables, *&c.* who neglect their Duty "in this reſpect, to forfeit *twenty Shillings*. "And all Perſons moleſting or hindring the "Execution of this Act, to forfeit *twenty* "*Shillings*."

Thus we ſee the Senſe of our own Legiſlature in this Matter. And Mr. *Collier* has aſſur'd us, that there are ſeveral *European* Countries that would never endure Stage-Plays in any Form, or under any Regulations. Is it not a Pity that any ſhould countenance *that* in one Capacity, which they ſo freely cenſure and condemn in another?

AND yet notwithſtanding this, which ſeems to have the Nature of their publick Proteſt againſt them, great Men have been ſaid to deſcend ſo low, as to be preſent even at ſome of the meaneſt of theſe Entertainments. Perſons of the firſt Rank in Life

have ſhewn a Fondneſs for this Method of amuſing themſelves: Though, perhaps, there are none whoſe Circumſtances and Stations they leſs ſuit, or whoſe real Intereſt they leſs ſerve. A Court can hardly ever countenance and attend Diverſions of this kind, without ſuffering by them.

ALL expenſive Purſuits after Pleaſure, all Inſtances of Exceſs and Luxury, naturally lead into diſhonourable Methods of Management. There muſt be ſome way of gathering again, what on theſe Occaſions is laviſhly ſcatter'd. This paves the Way to all Extortion and Rapine, to the greateſt Corruption and Abuſe of Intereſt and Power. This lays a Court open either to the Inſults, or the Practiſings, of neighbouring States; of which we have had a melancholy and undeniable Inſtance in the Reign of our late good-natur'd King *Charles* II. And both from the Nature of the Thing, and too frequent Experience, 'tis plain, that the giving into this merry gay Way of living muſt neceſſarily give a wrong Turn to our gay Youth of Quality. It will make them incapable of that cloſe Thought, and thorough Application, without which 'tis impoſſible to ſhine in any Poſt of Eminence. It takes off their Minds from every Thing that would enable them to make a decent Figure in Life. They meet with nothing there ſuited to give them one ſerious Thought of laying Schemes, drawing Memorials, or writing Letters of State.

AND

AND beſides this, the giving themſelves up to ſuch Entertainments and Diverſions, as Plays and Maſquerades, will very much debaſe them in the Opinion of Mankind. It will not only ſpoil their Taſte, and incapacitate them for Buſineſs, but it will give other Men very mean Notions of them. The accompanying with Men every way ſo much their Inferiors, can never be a Way to ſecure the Reſpect that is due to an elevated Station, or a publick Character. Great Men, even when they unbend or relax, ought to think it worthy of ſome Meaſure of their Care, that they do it with Decency. Their Minds are no more capable of uninterrupted Application than ours are. Some Diverſions therefore are neceſſary for them: Only let them, for Kind, be well choſen. And let ſuch and ſuch only be admitted to partake in them, who are ſome way fit to be their Companions and Aſſociates. Will it not abate of the Awe and the Reverence that is due to their Characters, if the Entertainments are very mean, ludicrous, and unmanly? Or if in the attending upon them they ſet themſelves upon a Level with the very Dregs of the People.

WITH ſuch Company, it is no very noble and grand Entertainment to be a Spectator of others Repreſentations; but 'tis ſtooping ſtill lower to become an Actor. Certainly 'tis a mean Employment to divert and entertain an Audience, to appear in different Dreſſes and Poſtures, to put on a various Humour and Paſſion, only to excite the Mirth and

Laughter of others, where there is no Pretence of Inſtruction or Advantage. 'Tis much beneath the Dignity of the Great, and leſſens the Regard to a Character of Wiſdom, and Poſt of Honour; and there are nobler Entertainments, and more manly Diverſions, than to act the *Jeſter*, and to go to *Childrens* Play.

I AM very ſenſible, that 'tis an Apprehenſion of its Popularity that has been the principal Inducement to Men of an advanc'd Station, to ſhew any Countenance to thoſe leſs reputable Diverſions. They have thought it good Policy, and a likely Means to gain the Affection and Applauſe of the Multitude. But then it ought to be conſider'd, that it muſt be the Weak, the Vicious, and the more Depraved of the Populace, that are this Way to be gain'd; Perſons, upon whoſe Integrity, or Ability to ſerve a Government, it can never be wiſe or ſafe to rely; while, by ſuch a Method of courting them, the more Grave and Thinking among their Subjects are ſhock'd, if not loſt, and wholly eſtranged from them.

I WOULD fain hope, therefore, that the *Free Thinker Extraordinary* had good Reaſon to doubt of the Truth of thoſe Reports that have been given out, That Plays and Maſquerades are in a very unuſual, almoſt unprecedented Manner countenanced and encouraged by the preſent Adminiſtration; eſpecially as to thoſe latter: For whatever favourable Conſtruction may be put upon the Performances of the Stage, yet the late Practice of

of Maſquerading ought, in an eſpecial Manner, to be proteſted againſt by every honeſt Man.

"I WILL not believe, ſays that Author, "that this Maſquerading is ſuch a favourite "Diverſion to ſome of the greateſt among us, "as is inſinuated; or, that Magiſtrates are "by this Conſideration deter'd from doing "their Duty: No, I know theſe are falſe "Reports, whoſe Authors, if they could be "found out, deſerve to be ſeverely puniſhed. "The Indecency, the Frequency, the Dan-"ger, the Place, and ſeveral other Circum-"ſtances, perſwade me, that 'tis rather the "Suggeſtion of thoſe, who, under a puiſſant "Name, would ſhelter their own Lewdneſs. "Our Archbiſhops and Biſhops, our Secreta-"ries of State, *&c.* would more carefully "watch over the publick Morals, and the "valuable Lives that might be intereſted by "being preſent at ſuch a ſcandalous Meet-"ing*."

NAY, methinks, I could almoſt believe, perhaps becauſe I wiſh, that they would readily give in to a Teſt, were it once propos'd to them, whereby every Man ſhould be render'd incapable of any Poſt of Honour, Truſt, or Profit, who had been ever ſeen at a Maſquerade.

AND I the rather think this, becauſe I know the very Origin of thoſe riotous Aſſemblies among us, muſt exceedingly prejudice the

* Freethinker Extraordinary, N° 4.

the Perſons I am now ſpeaking of againſt them. " For (as an ingenious Writer has " obſerv'd) they are an Innovation introduc'd " into this City by a *French* Duke, whoſe " chief Buſineſs it was to ſeduce us by ſpe- " cious Appearances; and to undermine the " Virtue of the Nation by ſuch Methods of " Luxury, and ſuch Maxims of Policy, as " we are ſure they neither did, nor can ap- " prove *." The ſame Author has two or three farther Reflections on theſe Entertainments, which I can't forbear tranſcribing from the ſame Paper: " Maſquerades, ſays he, may paſs " for a very arch Contrivance in Countries " where Jealouſy paſſes for Wiſdom; where " every Maſter of a Family locks up his " Women, and where the two Sexes never " have an Opportunity to converſe promiſ- " cuouſly, but in Diſguiſe. In *Great Britain* " the Ladies are as free as the Gentlemen; " and we have no Diverſions, nor publick " Amuſements, in which the one may not " appear, without Offence, as frankly as the " other, in their proper Perſons. They muſt " have very mean Notions of Politeneſs, who " can imagine this outlandiſh Extravagance " any Improvement to our national Diver- " ſions. The wearing of an odd Mask, or a " whimſical Habit, is a very poor mechani- " cal Way of being witty: And I am pleas'd " to find our Maſqueraders compleatly auk- " ward

* *The* Free-Thinker, N° 68.

" ward in their borrow'd Characters. Without anſwering Queſtions they expect their " Dreſs ſhould ſpeak for them: They ſtalk " about like a Crowd of Mutes; and the " great Room in the *Hay-Market*, upon theſe " Occaſions, reſembles (ſaid a pleaſant *North* " *Briton*) the Wardrobe of ſome antient *Gothick* King, animated by Goblins.

" IF we compute the Expence of the Habits, and the Expenſiveneſs of the Subſcriptions, to furniſh out thoſe Scenes of " Folly, the Contributors will juſtly fall under the Cenſure of a ſevere Proverb. Perſons of Quality and Faſhion ſhould never " debaſe their Liberality, by laviſhing away " Money to countenance, in a publick Manner, any Contrivance which can never tend " to improve any kind of Knowledge or Elegance in Life."

And a little lower he adds, for the Inſtruction and Reproof of our fine Ladies: " The " Women of Quality in old *Rome* would not " have disburs'd the ſmalleſt Piece of Coin to " ſupport a Maſquerade; and yet would, in " a Body, make the largeſt Subſcriptions to " ſerve the State, even to the Generoſity of " parting with their very Bracelets and Jewels, " freely and unask'd, for the Good of their " Country."

WAS it an unnatural Reflection, which the *Honeſt Gentleman* repreſents himſelf as making on his melancholy Dream upon this Subject? " The Government, methought, ſays he, when " I waked, muſt be afraid not only upon a " publick Account, for fear theſe mighty

" Meetings

"Meetings ſhould prove dangerous to the "Commonwealth, but alſo each for himſelf, "leſt he ſhould find his Wife or his Daughters "concern'd in this Extravagance *."

AND when Perſons that can ſo throughly remedy theſe Evils, are ſo particularly and nearly concern'd, will there be no Regard ſhewn to the earneſt Cries of this great City, that her Youth may not be infected, and their Inclinations drawn off from their Profeſſions and Employments? Will the Sighs and Tears of many once flouriſhing, but now diſconſolate Families, ruin'd by the diſſolute Lives of their chief Branches, who loſt their Virtue by frequenting theſe fatal Entertainments, move no Compaſſion? Will the earneſt Sollicitation of the wiſe and ſober Part of the Kingdom, to ſpare the ſmall Remains of Principle, Honour, and Conſcience, to ſtop the ſpreading Plague, prove ſtill ineffectual? If all this will not do, but Men will go on with inexorable Cruelty, to poiſon the Minds, and ruin the Morals of the Nation, I muſt be allow'd to ſay, there is nothing to be expected from the Attempts for Reformation, or the Preaching of the Clergy.

PREACHERS may urge it as the neceſſary Duty of the People, to avoid theſe Occaſions of Evil, and yet the People will almoſt run out of the Church to be at them. They may ſhew them how they ruſh into Snares, and

* Honeſt Gentleman, N° 4.

and they *will ruſh* into them. They may tell them from the Pulpit how they court Temptation, and invite all the Powers of Vice to try their Utmoſt upon them; they will court Temptation, they will invite and welcome the Tempter ſtill, tho' all Hell follow at his Heels. The Churches may e'en be ſhut up if the Maſquerades be kept open. 'Tis Miracle muſt be added to Preaching to ſave our Religion, as well as at firſt to eſtabliſh it. Theſe Practices are in Defiance to the very Deſign of preaching the Goſpel, which is, *To turn Men from thoſe Vanities to the living God.* It is all ruin'd and deſtroy'd therefore by theſe Diverſions.

I MAY venture to ſay, that the Apoſtles themſelves would have had no Succeſs, nor Chriſtianity gain'd Ground, if its Profeſſors had been allowed theſe Pomps and Vanities, which at their Baptiſm they renounc'd. To join in thus with the World, the Fleſh, and the Devil, is a renouncing their Baptiſm, as truly as Baptiſm is a renouncing them. 'Tis a Proof that the World, the Fleſh, and the Devil, are too hard for Baptiſm and Preaching.

'TIS a ſmall Matter, in Compariſon, the expoſing the Character and Habit of a Clergyman on theſe Occaſions, as is often done. The Miſchief lies in the Conſequence of ſeeing ſuch a one play the Fool, or lead off a Maſque: The Farce being acted in a religious Figure, the Abuſe ſtrikes ſtronger upon the Senſe, the Contempt is better ſpread, and the little Idea is apt to return upon the ſame Ap-

pearance: And what good can the beſt Sermon in the World do upon a Mind ſo prepoſſeſs'd? The Prepoſſeſſion contracted in Favour of the pleaſurable Sin, renders a Man impregnable to the ordinary Methods of Salvation. If they warn the People of Danger, and preſs Men earneſtly to fly from it; if they point out the fatal Rocks whereon ſo many Shipwrecks of Modeſty and Innocence have been made; Why, 'tis their Trade!

I CANNOT but here call upon our Divines: O ceaſe your other Quarrels, and unite your Thoughts againſt theſe growing Miſchiefs! Shew a little Zeal ſometimes for the Eſſence of your Religion! Spend not all your Flame about Rites and Ceremonies! For, if Maſquerades and Plays go on as they have done, they will, in time, leave you nothing but thoſe Ceremonies of all Religion; and that's pretty much the ſame with none at all. You have no Succeſs to hope for, while theſe Abominations are indulg'd, while theſe unhallow'd *Groves* and *High Places* of Immorality are frequented. You will either not be heard at all, or heard to no purpoſe.

THE next bad Thing to acting theſe, is to encourage them by being preſent at them; and the next to that, is to be inactive and ſilent, while this *evil Communication corrupts all good Manners.*

A PRIVATE Writer, abovemention'd, has very juſtly obſerv'd, "That it behoves the "Civil Magiſtrate not to authorize, nor even "to ſuffer any Shews or Spectacles of a Pub-"lick Nature, which do not, in ſome Degree,

"improve

" improve (at leaſt, not corrupt) the Minds " of the People while they are diverted. " * But I have not yet heard, that there has " any " Magiſtrate ſhewn himſelf ſo honeſt and " courageous as to come with his *Poſſe* of " Conſtables and Watch, and, after he has " read the Proclamation, break up ſuch a " profligate Aſſembly. Several to be met " with there, are Vagabonds by the Statute. " At ſuch a Time of Night, in ſuch a Place, " at ſuch a Time of Year, employ'd in ſuch " Work, as he will ſee all that he finds, they " are liable to be ſeiz'd and ſent to Gaol: And " his Oath and Duty, both to GOD and his " Country, oblige him to be active in ſup- " preſſing ſo horrid and unſeaſonable a Piece " of Riot, which no Country upon Earth has " even ſhewn the like of in all its Circum- " ſtances. " †

BUT if the Abuſe ſhould continue, I can't but hope there will be found ſome who will exert themſelves in correcting and ſuppreſſing it. Eſpecially ſince I find it obſerv'd in a late Charge to the Grand-Jury of *Middleſex*, That *one Play-Houſe ruins more Souls than fifty Churches are able to ſave*; ** and that the Maſquerades lately ſet up, even in *Lent*, are a Scene of Lewdneſs, a Congreſs to an unclean End; the Debauchery is here begun, and finiſh'd in the Neighbourhood.

* The *Freethinker*, Nº 68. † The *Freethinker Extraord.* Nº 4.

** Firſt Charge of *Whit. Bulſtrode* Eſq; *p.* 35, 37.

THE Mind is over-run with the Amuſement of theſe Diverſions, and is commonly good for nothing ſome time after. If they become frequent, the Minds of Men will be good for nothing to Eternity.

'TIS entring into a League with the World, the Fleſh, and the Devil, Nature, Paſſion, and Art, againſt Reaſon and Religion. They cheriſh thoſe very Paſſions which 'tis the very Buſineſs of Religion to diſcountenance and conquer; they ſtrike at the Root of all Principle, and draw off the Inclination from Virtue, and ſpoil all good Education. 'Tis the moſt effectual Method to baffle the Force of Diſcipline, to emaſculate the Spirits, and debauch the Manners. And yet theſe *Syrens* go on to devour the Unwary; and Men continue to ſay, the beſt Blood of the Nation is tainted with the Infection.

THE Lord Biſhop of *London*, in his Sermon lately preach'd to the *Societies for Reformation of Manners*, has born a publick Teſtimony againſt Maſquerades, for the following Reaſons: *viz.*

" As they deprive Virtue and Religion " of their laſt Refuge, I mean *Shame*, which " keeps Multitudes of Sinners within the " Bounds of *Decency*, after they have bro- " ken thro' all the Ties of Principle and Con- " ſcience. But this Invention ſets them free " from that Tie alſo, being neither better " nor worſe than an Opportunity to ſay " and do there what Virtue, Decency, and " Good-Manners will not permit to be ſaid or " done in any other Place. If Perſons of

" eitehr

" either Sex will frequent lewd and profane " Plays, or openly join themſelves to looſe " and atheiſtical Aſſemblies of any kind, *they* " *have their Reward*; they are ſure to be " mark'd and branded by all good Men as " Perſons of corrupt Minds, and vicious In- " clinations, who have abandon'd Religion, " and all Pretenſions to it, and given them- " ſelves over to Luxury and Profaneneſs. And " as bad as the World is, this is a very heavy " Load upon the Characters of Men; and, in " ſpite of all the Endeavours of Vice to bear " up and keep it ſelf in Countenance, it " ſinks them by Degrees into Infamy and " Contempt. But this pernicious Invention " *intrenches* Vice and Profaneneſs againſt all " the Aſſaults and Impreſſions of Shame; and " whatever Lewdneſs may be concerted, " whatever Luxury, Immodeſty, or Extra- " vagance may be committed in Word or " Deed, no one's Reputation is at ſtake, no " one's Character is reſponſible for it: A Cir- " cumſtance of ſuch terrible Conſequence to " Virtue and Good Manners, that if *Maſque-* " *rades* ſhall ever be reviv'd, as we heartily " hope they will not, all ſerious Chriſtians " within theſe two great and populous Cities " will be nearly concern'd to lay it to Heart, " and diligently to beſtir themſelves in cau- " tioning their Friends and Neighbours againſt " ſuch fatal Snares: Particularly, all who " have the Government and Education of " Youth, ought to take the greateſt Care to " keep them out of the way of this dange- " rous Temptation. And then to labour

" againſt

" againſt the *ſpreading* of it, conſidering the " Proneneſs of Mankind to fall into the Di- " verſions and Manners of thoſe who are of " a ſuperior Rank and Character.

" I CANNOT forbear to add, That, all " *religious Conſiderations* apart, this is a Diver- " ſion that no *true Engliſhman* ought to be fond " of, when he remembers that it was brought " among us by the Ambaſſador of a neigh- " bouring Nation in the laſt Reign, while his " Maſter was in Meaſures to *enſlave* us. And " indeed there is not a more effectual way to " enſlave a People, than firſt to diſpirit and " enfeeble them by Licentiouſneſs and Ef- " feminacy."

FINIS.